BHAGAVAD-GITA
A NEW ENGLISH TRANSLATION AND COMMENTARY

CHAPTERS 1 – 6

To

The lotus feet of Shri Guru Deva,
His Divinity Swami Brahmananda Saraswati, Jagadguru,
Bhagwan Shankaracharya of Jyotir Math, Himalayas;
and as blessings from Him to the lovers of life
desirous of enjoying all glories, worldly and divine

His Divinity Swami Brahmananda Saraswati, Jagadguru, Bhagwan Shankaracharya of Jyotir Math



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A NEW ENGLISH TRANSLATION
AND COMMENTARY
BY MAHARISHI MAHESH YOGI
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A REDISCOVERY
TO FULFIL THE NEED OF OUR TIME
BY HIS HOLINESS
MAHARISHI MAHESH YOGI

His Holiness Maharishi Mahesh Yogi



PREFACE

The Vedas are the lighthouse of eternal wisdom leading man to salvation and inspiring him to supreme accomplishment.

The omnipresence of eternal Being, unmanifested and absolute; Its status as That, even in the manifested diversity of creation; and the possibility of the realization of Being by any man in terms of himself — these are the great truths of the perennial philosophy of the Vedas.

The Vedas reveal the unchanging Unity of life which underlies the evident multiplicity of creation, for Reality is both manifest and unmanifest, and That alone is. 'I am That, thou are That and all this is That', is the Truth; and this is the kernel of the Vedic teaching, which the rishis extol as teaching 'worthy of hearing, contemplating and realizing'.

The truth of Vedic wisdom is by its very nature independent of time and can therefore never be lost. When, however, man's vision becomes one-sided and he is caught by the binding influence of the phenomenal world to the exclusion of the absolute phase of Reality, when he is thus confined within the ever-changing phases of existence, his life loses stability and he begins to suffer. When suffering grows, the invincible force of nature moves to set man's vision right and establish a way of life which will again fulfil the high purpose of his existence. The long history of the world records many such periods in which the ideal pattern of life is first forgotten and then restored to man.

Veda Vyasa, the sage of enlightened vision and greatest among the historians of antiquity, records the growth of unrighteousness in the families of those who ruled the people about five thousand years ago. It was then that Lord Krishna came to remind man of the true values of life and living. He restored that direct contact with the transcendental Being which alone can give fullness to every aspect of life. He brought to light absolute Being as the basic Reality of life and established It as the foundation of all thinking,

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whole structure is the basis of all doing. This philosophy of Being, thinking and doing is the true philosophy of the integrated life. It not only helps the doer to gain success in his undertakings, but at the same time sets him free from the bondage of action, bringing fulfilment at every level. Such is the teaching of eternal [illegible] by Lord Krishna to Arjuna in the Bhagavad-Gita.

Gradually this teaching came to be forgotten, so that some thousand years later even the principle of Being as the ultimate Reality, the source and basis of all creation, was overshadowed by misguided beliefs which glorified only the outer aspects of life. The long lapse of time, says Lord Krishna, is the cause of such a loss of wisdom.

When the philosophy of the integrated life revealed by Lord Krishna was lost from view, the idea grew that everything which life can offer is present on the obvious levels of existence, and that it would therefore be useless to aspire to anything that might be deeper than external appearances. Society became dominated by this superficial outlook. Insight into Reality was lost, the true sense of values forgotten and the stability of life destroyed. Tension, confusion, superstition, unhappiness and fear prevailed.

Lord Buddha came to remedy this situation, finding the field of action distorted. He came with a message of right action. Speaking from the level of consciousness established in Being, in eternal freedom (nirvana), Lord Buddha taught the philosophy of action in freedom. He advocated meditation in order to purify the field of thought through direct contact with Being and bring about the state of right action in society. Lord Buddha's message was complete because He incorporated the fields of Being, thinking and doing in His theme of revival. But because his followers failed to correlate these different fields of life in a systematic manner through the practice of transcendental meditation, realization of Being as the basis of a good life became obscured. The whole structure of Lord Buddha's teaching not only became distorted but was also turned upside down. The effect was mistaken for the cause. Right action came to be regarded as a means to gain nirvana, whereas right action is in fact the result of the state of consciousness in freedom.

It has been the misfortune of every great teacher that, while he speaks from his level of consciousness, his followers can only receive his message on their level, and the gulf between the teaching and understanding grows wider with time.

The teaching of right action without the emphasis on the primary necessity of realization of Being is like building a wall without a foundation. It sways with the wind and collapses before long. Within three or four hundred years all real connection between the essential teachings of Lord Buddha and the daily life of the followers had disappeared, in light of the principle of the [illegible] that [illegible] having forgotten the prime in-

which in turn is the basis of all doing. This philosophy of Being, thinking and doing is the true philosophy of the integrated life. It not only helps the doer to gain success in his undertaking but, at the same time, sets him free from the bondage of action, bringing fulfilment at every level. Such is the teaching of eternal Truth, given by Lord Krishna to Arjuna in the Bhagavad-Gita.

Gradually this teaching came to be forgotten, so that two thousand years later even the principle of Being as the absolute Reality, the source and basis of all creation, was overshadowed by misguided beliefs which glorified only the relative aspects of life. 'The long lapse of time', says Lord Krishna, is the reason for such a loss of wisdom.

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portance of realizing Being, society became immersed once more in the superficialities of life.

Nature will not allow humanity to be deprived of the vision of Reality for very long. A wave of revival brought Shankara to re-establish the basis of life and renew human understanding. Shankara restored the wisdom of the Absolute and established It in the daily life of the people, strengthening the fields of thought and action by the power of Being. He brought the message of fulfilment through direct realization of transcendental Being in the state of Self-consciousness, which is the basis of all good in life.

Shankara's emphasis on Self-realization stems from the eternal philosophy of the integrated life expressed by Lord Krishna in the Bhagavad-Gita when He asks Arjuna first to 'be without the three gunas' and then to perform actions while thus established in Being. That all men should at all times live the bliss-consciousness of absolute Being, and that they should live the state of fulfilment in God-consciousness throughout all thought, speech and action; this is the essence of Shankara's message, as it is the essence of Lord Krishna's and of the entire Vedic philosophy.

The greatest blessing that Shankara's teaching has offered to the world is the principle of fullness of intellectual and emotional development in the state of enlightenment, based on transcendental pure consciousness, in which the heart is so pure as to be able to flow and overflow with waves of universal love and devotion to God, while the mind is so refined as to enjoy awareness of the divine nature as separate from the world of action.

The spontaneous expressions of Shankara's mind and heart in this state of freedom and fulfilment have been a source of inspiration both to those who live by the heart and those who live by the mind. His consciousness exemplified the highest state of human development; his heart expressed supreme transcendental devotion to God (para bhakti), while his mind expressed awareness of the Self as separate from the field of action (gyana). This it was that led Shankara's speech to flow into ecstasies of devotion and at the same time into clear expressions of knowledge, the dry and hard-headed truths concerning divine nature as detached from the world. These are the two aspects of the living reality of a life in complete fulfilment.

Shankara not only revived the wisdom of integrated life and made it popular in his day, but also established four principal seats of learning in four corners of India to keep his teaching pure and to ensure that it would be propagated in its entirety generation after generation. For many centuries his teaching remained alive in his followers, who lived the ideal state of knowledge with devotion (gyana and bhakti). But in spite of all his foresight and endeavours, Shankara's message inevitably suffered with time the same misfortunes as those of other great teachers.

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the foundations lie underground, hidden from view. It is no surprise that Being was lost to view, for It lies in the transcendental field of life.

The state of Reality, as described by the enlightened, cannot become a path for the seeker, any more than the description of a destination can replace the road that leads to it. When the truth that Being forms the basis of the state of enlightenment became obscured, Shankara's statements about the nature of the goal were mistaken for the path to realization.

This misunderstanding was increased by the very beauty of Shankara's eloquence. His expressions of deep devotion made in the state of complete surrender and oneness with God, and his intellectual clarifications made in the state of awareness of the divine nature, are both so full and complete in themselves that, seen from the ordinary level of consciousness, they appeared to present two independent paths to enlightenment: the path of knowledge and the path of devotion.

This is the tragedy of knowledge, the tragic fate that knowledge must meet at the hands of ignorance. It is inevitable, because the teaching comes from one level of consciousness and is received at quite a different level. The knowledge of Unity must in time shatter on the hard rocks of ignorance. History has proved this again and again. Shankara's teaching could not prove an exception to the rule.

The idea of two paths became more predominant owing to the carelessness of the custodians of Shankara's teaching. Since they followed the recluse way of life, they were naturally concerned with thoughts of the separateness of the Divine from the world; and, with the continuance of this situation generation after generation, the aspect of knowledge began to dominate Shankara's tradition while the aspect of devotion gradually lost its importance. The teaching became one-sided and, deprived of its wholeness, eventually lost its universal appeal. It came to be regarded as mayavada, a philosophy of illusion, holding the world to be only illusory and emphasizing the detached way of life.

As the principle of Being began more and more to disappear from view, the paths of devotion and knowledge became more and more separate and finally the link between them was lost. The principle of full development of heart and mind through one process (transcendental meditation) was lost. The integral nature of realization was lost. The true wisdom of life's fulfilment, which lies in the simultaneous development of heart and mind, was lost. The idea that devotion and knowledge are necessarily separate was the greatest blow to Shankara's teaching.

In the absence of the moon, the stars take over and provide as much light as they can. When Shankara's high ideal of transcendental devotion disappeared from sight, Ramanuja, Madhva and other teachers upheld the path of devotion, even though without its

proper basis in Being. People followed them, and thus there arose many devotional sects all on the level of emotion and every one founded on the comfortable basis of hope that 'some day our prayer will be heard, some day He will come to us and call us to Him'. Indeed a comfort to the heart but, alas, such devotion is on the imaginary plane of feeling! It is far, far away from the reality of actual contact between the devotee and his God. Awareness in the state of Being alone makes the whole field of devotion real.

All these sects hold that transcendental devotion is the last stage of a devotee's achievement. But Shankara's principle of devotion is founded on transcendental consciousness from the very beginning. The first step for Shankara is the last step for these devotional sects, a step which according to their understanding is far above the reach of the ordinary man.

The idea that devotion must start from transcendental consciousness having been lost by the guardians of Shankara's wisdom, entrance into the field of devotion was closed. Seekers of God remained seeking in thin air, and lovers of God remained weeping for Him without finding Him.

As devotion remained merely on the level of thinking and of assuming an attitude of feeling (mood-making), so knowledge met with the same fate once the direct way to the realization of transcendental consciousness had been lost. Understanding of the Unity of life cannot be significant until one has thoroughly understood, by direct experience, that one's inner divine nature is separate from the world of action. If a man has not gained consciousness in Being through the practice of transcendental meditation, he continues to live in ignorance and bondage. Because he has not yet opened himself to the experience of the separateness of the Divine from the world, the thought of Unity has no practical use for such a man. He has nothing to unite.

On the fertile field of transcendental consciousness both knowledge and devotion find their fulfilment. But this principle once forgotten and the technique for developing transcendental consciousness lost, many, many generations have died without seeing the light of God and without gaining fulfilment. That has been the situation for more than a thousand years. Misunderstanding itself has taken the shape of a tradition, unfortunately known as Shankara's tradition. This great loss to human life can hardly be compensated; but that has been the course of history. Time cannot be recaptured. It is no use repenting the past.

In our review of the rise and fall of Truth, we must not lose sight of the great impact that Shankara produced on Indian life. It was the perfection of his presentation that caused Shankara's teaching to be accepted as the core of Vedic wisdom and placed it at the centre of Indian culture. It became so inseparable from the Indian way of life that when, in course of time, this teaching lost its universal character and came to be interpreted as for the recluse

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order alone, the whole basis of Indian culture came, to be regarded in terms of the renunciation of life founded on renunciation and detachment.

When this detached view of life became accepted as the basis of Vedic wisdom, the wholeness of life and fulfilment was lost. This error of understanding has dominated Indian culture for centuries and has turned the principle of life upside down. The pivotal basis of detachment! This is a complete distortion of Indian philosophy. It has not only destroyed the path to realization but has left the seekers of Truth continuously astray. Indeed it has left them without the possibility of ever finding the goal.

Not only was the path to enlightenment lost, but the whole art of living disappeared in the clouds of ignorance which enveloped every phase of life. Even religion became blind to itself. Instead of directly helping people to gain God-consciousness and to act rightly on that basis, religious preachers began to teach that right action is in itself a way to purification and thereby to God-consciousness.

Without Being, confusion of cause and effect invaded every field of understanding. It captured even the most practical field of the philosophy of Yoga. Karma Yoga (attainment of Union by way of action) began to be understood as based on Karma (action), whereas its basis is Yoga, Union, transcendental consciousness. The founder of the Yoga philosophy, Patanjali, was himself misinterpreted and the order of stages on his eightfold path reversed. The practice of Yoga was understood to start with yama, niyama, and so on (the secular virtues), whereas in reality it should begin with samadhi. Samadhi cannot be gained by the practice of yama, niyama, and so on. Proficiency in the virtues can only be gained by repeated experiences of samadhi. It was because the effect was mistaken for the cause that this great philosophy of life became distorted and the path to samadhi was blocked.

With the loss of insight into Yoga, the other five classical systems of Indian philosophy lost their power. They remained on the theoretical level of knowledge, for it is through Yoga alone that knowledge steps into practical life.

Thus we find that all fields of religion and philosophy have been misunderstood and wrongly interpreted for many centuries past. This has blocked the path to the fullest development of heart and mind, so precisely revived by Shankara.

Interpretations of the Bhagavad Gita and other Indian scriptures are now so full of the idea of renunciation that they are regarded with distrust by practical men in every part of the world. Many Western universities hesitate to teach Indian philosophy for this reason. The responsibility for this loss of Truth to the whole world lies with the interpreters of Shankara's teaching. Missing the essence of his wisdom, they have been unable to save the world from falling ever deeper into ignorance and suffering.

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order alone, the whole basis of Indian culture also began to be considered in terms of the recluse way of life, founded on renunciation and detachment.

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This age has, however, been fortunate. It has witnessed the

living example of a man inspired by Vedic wisdom in its wholeness and thus able to revive the philosophy of the integrated life in all its truth and fullness. His Divinity Swami Brahmananda Saraswati, the inspiration and guiding light of this commentary on the Bhagavad-Gita, adorned the seat of the Shankaracharya of the North and, glowing in divine radiance, embodied in himself the head and heart of Shankara. He expounded the Truth in Its all-embracing nature. His quiet words, coming from the unbounded love of his heart, pierced the hearts of all who heard him and brought enlightenment to their minds. His message was the message of fullness of heart and mind. He moved as the living embodiment of Truth and was addressed as Vedanta Incarnate by that great Indian philosopher, now President of India, Dr. Radhakrishnan.

It was the concern of Guru Deva, His Divinity Swami Brahmananda Saraswati, to enlighten all men everywhere that resulted in the foundation of the world-wide Spiritual Regeneration Movement in 1958, five years after his departure from us.

India is a country where Truth matters most and Indians are a people to whom God matters most. Indian soil has witnessed many times the revival of life's true philosophy. The people of India have never hesitated to return once more to the right path whenever it was convincingly pointed out to them that their way of life had taken a wrong course. This receptiveness to Truth of the Indian people has always been a source of inspiration and a signal of hope to all movements aiming at the revival of true life and living.

May the present commentary on the Bhagavad-Gita produce the desired effect in response to the historical necessity of today.

The purpose of this commentary is to restore the fundamental truths of the Bhagavad-Gita and thus restore the significance of its teaching. If this teaching is followed, effectiveness in life will be achieved, men will be fulfilled on all levels and the historical need of the age will be fulfilled also.

INTRODUCTION

The Bhagavad-Gita is the Light of Life, lit by God at the altar of man, to save humanity from the darkness of ignorance and suffering. It is a scripture which outlives time, and can be acknowledged as indispensable to the life of any man in any age. It is the encyclopaedia of life and this commentary provides an index to it.

There will always be confusion and chaos in the relative fields of life and man's mind will always fall into error and indecision. The Bhagavad-Gita is a complete guide to practical life. It will always be there to rescue man in any situation. It is like an anchor for the ship of life sailing on the turbulent waves of time.

It brings fulfilment to the life of the individual. When society accepts it, social well-being and security will result, and when the world hears it, world peace will be permanent.

The Bhagavad-Gita presents the science of life and the art of living. It teaches how to be, how to think and how to do. Its technique of glorifying every aspect of life through contact with inner Being is like watering the root and making the whole tree green. It surpasses any practical wisdom of life ever cherished by human society.

The Bhagavad-Gita has a greater number of commentaries than any other known scripture. The reason for adding one more is that there does not seem to be any commentary which really brings to light the essential point of the whole teaching.

Wise commentators, in their attempt to fulfil the need of their times, have revealed the truth of the teaching as they found it. By so doing they have secured a place in the history of human thought. They stand out as torch-bearers on the long corridor of time. They have fathomed great depths of the ocean of wisdom. Yet with all their glorious achievements they have not brought out the central point of the Bhagavad-Gita. It is unfortunate that the very essence of this ancient wisdom should have been missed.

The Bhagavad-Gita needs a commentary which restates in simple words the essential teaching and technique given by Lord Krishna to Arjuna on the battlefield. There are commentaries to extol the

wisdom of the paths of knowledge, devotion and action in the Bhagavad-Gita, but none to show that it provides a master-key to open the gates of all these different highways of human evolution simultaneously. No commentary has yet shown that through one simple technique proclaimed in the Bhagavad-Gita, any man, without having to renounce his way of life, can enjoy the blessings of all these paths.

This commentary has been written to present that key to mankind and preserve it for generations to come.

The Bhagavad-Gita is the Scripture of Yoga, the Scripture of Divine Union. Its purpose is to explain in theory and practice all that is needed to raise the consciousness of man to the highest possible level. The marvel of its language and style is that every expression brings a teaching suitable to every level of human evolution.

Fundamentally there are four levels of consciousness on each of which the nature of the practice changes: the waking state, transcendental consciousness, cosmic consciousness and God-consciousness. Every teaching of the Bhagavad-Gita has its application on each of these planes of development. Every expression must therefore be interpreted in four different ways to explain, both in theory and practice, the ascending progression of the discourse on each of these four different levels. Thus it is obvious that the Bhagavad-Gita as a whole must also be interpreted in four different ways so that the whole path to God-realization may be explained clearly.

As the Bhagavad-Gita has not yet been interpreted in this manner, the true message of the scripture has remained dormant. It is highly important that these four commentaries should be written, not only to do justice to the scripture but also to present a straight path to the seeker and bring him the profound wisdom of this practical philosophy.

Thorough knowledge of any subject requires that its validity be substantiated by the criteria provided by the six systems of Indian philosophy: Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Sankhya, Yoga, Karma Mimansa and Vedanta.

In order to be complete, every aspect of the theory and practice at any stage of development must be verifiable by all these six systems simultaneously. It follows therefore that six interpretations of each of the four commentaries mentioned above are necessary to bring to light the complete significance of the Bhagavad-Gita.

The present commentary should be regarded as a general basis for these twenty-four commentaries. If time allows, these commentaries will be written. But because the world is in such urgent need of the basic principle of spiritual development, it has been thought necessary to bring out the present commentary without further loss of time.

wisdom of the paths of knowledge, devotion and action in the Bhagavad-Gita, but none to show that it provides a master-key to open the gates of all these different highways of human evolution simultaneously. No commentary has yet shown that through one simple technique prescribed in the Bhagavad-Gita, any man, without having to renounce his way of life, can enjoy the blessings of all these paths.

This commentary has been written to present that key to mankind and preserve it for generations to come.

The Bhagavad-Gita is the Scripture of Yoga, the Scripture of Divine Union. Its purpose is to explain in theory and practice all that is needed to raise the consciousness of man to the highest possible level. The marvel of its language and style is that every expression brings a teaching suitable to every level of human evolution.

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INTRODUCTION

It will be of interest to the reader to know that this commentary is being brought out only after the technique has been verified in the lives of thousands of people of different nationalities throughout the world, under the auspices of the Spiritual Regeneration Movement founded with the sole purpose of spiritually regenerating the lives of all men in every part of the world. It presents a truth that is timeless and universal, a truth of life equally suited to all men, irrespective of differences of faith, culture or nationality.

The overall conception of this commentary is supplementary to the unique vision and profound wisdom of the great Shankara, as set forth in his Gita-Bhashya. The wisdom is a gift from Guru Deva. All glory to Him! It presents the Light of Life and sets the stream of life to find its fulfilment in the ocean of eternal Being, in devotion to God and in the bliss of God-consciousness.

May every man make use of the practical wisdom given in the 45th verse of the second chapter and thereby glorify all aspects of his life and gain eternal freedom in divine consciousness.

The Old Manor,
Aldbourne,
Wiltshire,
England

M.

12th January 1965